

Carers Newsletter Summer 2007

**A newsletter for carers in Newcastle,
produced by Carers Centre Newcastle.**



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Carers Week

Yes, it's that time of year again when we start looking ahead to National Carers Week. This year, Carers Week runs from the 11th to the 17th June and has the theme 'My life as a carer'. Carers UK, who spearhead the Carers Week campaign, will be using the week to promote and highlight the following carers issues across the country: Finances, Career, Social life and Relationships, Health and Wellbeing.

Here in Newcastle we will be celebrating Carers Week with a day *trip to Durham on Wednesday 13th June. There will be opportunities to visit historic Crook Hall or Durham Cathedral, go shopping in the City centre or enjoy a walk along the river.

We are also delighted to announce that the Carers Centre will be hosting a visit from Dame Denise Platt during Carers Week. Dame Denise is the Chief Inspector for the Commission for Social Care Inspection, a non-departmental Government body responsible for inspecting and assessing the performance of all social care services in England. Prior to this, she was Chief Inspector, Social Services Inspectorate, and Director for Children, Older People and Social Care Services at the Department of Health in England.

In addition, we will be working closely with Newcastle City Council Customer Service Centres throughout the week, to identify hidden carers. Carers Centre Manager, Katie Dodd said, “The Council’s Customer Service Centres are ideal places for making contact with carers. We hope to identify lots of hidden carers during the week, that is carers who don’t know that there is support available for them, and then point them in the direction of people and services that can help.”

***Trip to Durham - The Carers Centre is paying for travel and entrance fees but we are asking a £5 charge per person as a contribution towards costs, payable on booking. Coach leaves from outside Central Station at around 10am and returns mid afternoon. All carers are welcome; please contact Carers Centre Newcastle to book your place on telephone 0191 260 3030, 6 Saville Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8DQ.**

Lay Research Group in Palliative Care

The 'Lay Research Group in Palliative Care' is looking for new members to join them. This is a great opportunity for local carers to get involved in 'influencing practice and policy development in the NHS and charitable healthcare organisations'.

The group's facilitator, Dr Philip Cheung, told us "It will be a year in July since the group began meeting at the Carers Centre. A member suggested last month that we should re-launch our group as the 'Palliative Care Support Group', providing a space for people to talk and discuss their concerns. The group can find ways of helping patients who are receiving palliative care and those providing support for patients. Issues raised can then be used as the basis for research."

The group can also provide practical advice to members and meetings are friendly and informal with refreshments provided; new members are assured of a warm welcome. If you are interested in joining or finding out more please contact the Carers Centre and we will pass on your details to Dr Cheung who will then be in touch with you.

What is palliative care?

"Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. [Source: World Health Organisation]"

At the Carers Centre

Green fingered group

This is an appeal to all gardeners and would-be gardeners. We are looking for carers and former carers who are interested in being part of a gardening group, due to start this Autumn. We are hoping to secure a plot at Moorside Allotment Association in Fenham where work will be supervised by John Reid, an experienced and prize-winning gardener, and former carer. Beginners & experienced gardeners welcome. If you are interested in being involved please contact Jane Sivell at the Carers Centre on 0191 260 3030.

Time Out

Time Out, a friendship group for former carers is looking for new members. Meetings are on the third Tuesday of every month, 2pm to 4pm at the Carers Centre. Contact Jane Sivell at the Centre on 0191 260 3030 to find out more.

Princess Royal Trust for Carers

We are currently in negotiations with the Princess Royal Trust for Carers (PRT) to join their national network of Carers Centres. Membership of the PRT brings a wealth of opportunity to the Carers Centre, giving us access to a huge store of

knowledge and experience, advice and information from a charity that is the largest provider of comprehensive carers support services in the UK. Lynne Gray, Chair of the Carers Centre Management Committee said "We are really excited about working with the PRT and feel confident that our membership application will be accepted by the end of the year. As a prospective member we have already received the benefits of being offered six free places for carers at Pontins, Blackpool during Carers Week, which we filled easily. Once we are full members we expect to receive even more holiday places in the future."

Former carers

At a recent staff and management committee away-day, we discussed the issue of former carers. We agreed that it hasn't been very clear what the Carers Centre's commitment is to former carers and that it is time to clear this up.

Not everyone knows that Carers Centre Newcastle does indeed support former carers. However, there are limits to our resources and so the main focus of our work is on those people who are currently in the thick of caring. We know from talking to those of you who are former carers that this is what you want too.

We are now in the process of improving our systems for supporting carers and former carers. This will mean some changes to the services that former carers receive and we will be writing individually to all of you who are affected by this. The main change is that all of our key services, for example, the Pamper Room and Counselling Service, will no longer be available to former carers; although carers will be entitled to use our services for up to six months after becoming a former carer. After that, former carers are still very welcome at the Carers Centre – there are a number of carers groups that encourage involvement from former carers and the knowledge and experience they bring; and there are always volunteer opportunities available at the Centre. Later in the year, we will also be producing a Former Carers Factsheet to provide information on sources of help and support on topics such as employment, social activities, and emotional support.

Another Young Carers Worker

In April we welcomed a new addition to the Young Carers Team. Elizabeth Leadbitter joins Doug Laidlaw in promoting and supporting young carers across the City. Elizabeth will lead on issues relating to drugs and alcohol, and mental health problems.

Congratulations to Doug who welcomed his own new addition in March, with the arrival of son Finn. Our best wishes go to Doug, Nicole and big brother Evan.

New Committee confirmed

There was a great turnout at the Carers Centre Annual General Meeting in March with over 70 carers coming along to hear Councillor Brenda Hindmarsh talk about the City Council's commitment to carers, and Lynne Gray, Chair of the Carers Centre from Management Committee give a review of the past year at the Carers Centre. The new Management Committee was voted in and members are: Lynne Gray (Chair), Trevor Moon (Secretary), Neil Peacock (Treasurer), Van Brunning, Linda Erskine, Joyce Harris, Linda Hunter, Marie Jeffels, Brian Morphew, Cornelia Moosman and John Reid.

He's got an Art for winning

Congratulations to local carer and old friend of the Carers Centre, Art Ludlow on being awarded overall winner in the Chronicle 'Champions of the North' competition. Art received his award in recognition of the full time care that he has given to his disabled brother since his parents died 15 years ago. Art said "It's unbelievable, I'm walking on air. I never thought in a million years I would win... I'm really chuffed." [Quote: NCJ Media]

The Benefits Column

written

by Newcastle Welfare Rights Service

Are you caring for someone and would you like to work? Recent research by Carers UK shows that one in three carers don't work but would like to if the right support was available. Here we look at some of the welfare benefits available to working carers.

Carers Allowance - The main benefit for carers is Carers Allowance. To get this, you must be over 16 and caring for at least 35 hours per week for someone who receives Attendance Allowance or the middle or higher rate of Disability Living Allowance.

You can still claim Carers Allowance if you are working and earn a low wage. In the tax year 2007-2008 a low wage means earning on average £87 per week or under, after deducting work related expenses. Work related expenses include:

- tax and national insurance payments;**
- half of any contribution you make to an occupational pension or personal pension;**
- expenses incurred in the duties of your employment e.g. equipment, special clothing and travel expenses between work places;**

- **payments made to someone other than a close relative to look after the person you care for, or to look after a child under 16 up to a maximum of half your net earnings.**

Tax Credits - If you are in low paid work you may qualify for Working Tax Credit. Unless you have dependant children or have disabilities that put you at a disadvantage of getting work, you or your partner usually have to be aged 25 or over and work for 30 hours a week to qualify for Working Tax Credit. Child Tax Credits can be also paid if you are on a low income, whether you are working or not as long you are responsible for children. Both tax credits are means tested. Your income has to be within a set limit (which varies according to your circumstances). All taxable income from employment is taken into account.

Income Support - If you are claiming Income Support as a carer there is no limit on the number of hours you work. However your earnings will affect the amount of Income Support you receive. If you are entitled to the Carer's Premium as part of your Income Support you will be allowed a £20 disregard on your earnings. Above this level your Income Support will be reduced pound for pound.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit - If you are on a fairly low income and you don't have

savings more than £16000 you may qualify for Housing Benefit to help with your rent, and Council Tax Benefit to help with your council tax bill. As with Income Support, your earnings are taken into account as income with a £20 a week disregard, if you have entitlement to the Carers Allowance.

Get Advice! - Because of the complexity of the benefit system it is vital to get advice before making any claims for benefit, taking up work or increasing your hours at work.

How to find out more

- **Book a confidential one-to-one session with Newcastle Welfare Rights Service at Carers Centre Newcastle (see front page for contact details). Appointments are available between 10am and 12 noon on the third Friday of every month; or**
- **to find out where your nearest advice service is: contact Carers Centre Newcastle; or look for the booklet “Where to get advice in Newcastle” available from the Civic Centre or any public Social Services office; or visit the Welfare Rights website at www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights**

Do you care for a visually impaired child?

Local charity Usefulvision are inviting families with visually impaired children to join them on a trip to the South Lakes Wild Animal Park on Saturday, 15th September. Children will have the opportunity to feed the lemurs, penguins and kangaroos as well as handle many other types of animal. The Park also offers a safari train ride, café and picnic areas, and children's playground.

The trip is free for children of families who are registered with Usefulvision (with one free adult per free child and £5.00 for each additional adult as a contribution towards travel and entrance fee). To register with Usefulvision or to find out more about this and other trips, please contact them at Grey Court, Riding Mill, Northumberland NE44 6AA, telephone 01434 682 160 or 07703 494 947, Email rebeccawilson@usefulvision.org.uk or via the website at www.usefulvision.org.uk

Did you know? Real Stories from our Carer Support Team

It pays to get advice

Carer Mr A found himself in serious financial difficulties and decided to take out a loan to pay back debts he had built up and also buy some items he needed for his house. He took no advice about this and not wanting to admit to being in financial straits, organised a loan over the telephone with what appeared to be a reputable organisation. He had gone as far as signing the contract and the loan repayments were due to commence in a couple of month's time when he showed his agreement to a Carer Support Worker. She was horrified to see he was being charged almost £40 per month for loan protection. After a long battle and some hard negotiating, the loan protection, which is optional, was removed and the loan refinanced at the same low interest rate originally offered but over a shorter repayment period. This resulted in Mr A paying almost the same monthly amount but over 31 months instead of 58. Had he not received support, Mr A would have paid out a staggering £4,000 in additional payments.

If you are considering taking out a loan, do be sure to take advice and do not sign any agreement unless you have read and understood all the

conditions. Loan protection is optional and obtaining a loan should not be conditional on taking out the insurance cover, no matter how persuasive the salesman is! If you feel yourself getting into financial difficulties, there are organisations to help you. Contact Wendy at the Carers Centre to find out more.

Ken's story, in his own words

"When I first had contact with the Carers Centre I was in a very confused and anxious state having been in a caring situation dictated by my father's needs for some 12 years. Once he went into residential care I had my own needs and practicalities to contend with such as changes to the benefits I was receiving and a need to find somewhere else to live myself. I also had a need to work again after an absence of some 14 years. Where do I start, I thought?"

"Through the support and practical help of the Carers Centre, I was accompanied to the Job Centre and introduced to Working Links and in turn to Learning Links. The need to come to terms with the modern workplace meant attending two courses at Learning Links and at first it was frightening to find out how distant all that felt and how lacking my confidence was. That said, the courses re-kindled my existing knowledge and experience and helped me to re-focus on my aims and objectives and provided me with the

computer training so essential to today's workplace. They allow you to work at your own pace applying no pressure so you can fit it in with the demands of your everyday life. Throughout all this, my mentor at Working Links maintained weekly contact to encourage me and now, after only two quickly passing months, I am almost ready to apply for jobs."

"None of this would have been possible without taking the first step – a step that could only be taken with the help and support that the Carers Centre gave me. When people I had never met before are prepared to do so much to help me, I owe it to them to respond accordingly. Remember, it is important to go along with an open mind as you are among friends. I now feel that I could chew my way through a jungle! Thanks to everyone."

Working and Learning Links can help you find a job, improve interview skills, build confidence, help with skills brush up, write CV's and find job placements. To find out more, contact Andrea at the Carers Centre.

Listen to debate online

Thanks to carer Joan Kirsopp for making us aware of the Radio 4 'You and Yours' programme that aired earlier this year on the subject of the social care system in the UK. This is an interesting and informative programme featuring comments from carers on issues such as the problems with 'continuing care'; why the social care system seems to be failing users and carers, and what the solutions might be.

**Those with access to the internet can hear the programme live via the following weblink:
www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/youandyours/items/01/2007_19_mon.shtml**